

honored to acknowledge constituents who selflessly answered the call to serve and defend our freedom. A United States Navy veteran of World War II and member of the Greatest Generation, Mr. Padula served his country with honor. Self-sacrifice, personal responsibility, and humility are traits this generation embodied. The tremendous strides our country has made since World War II are a direct result of these great Americans. North Carolina is truly fortunate to have Mr. Padula, an outstanding representative of our community and country. I join with his family, friends, and the Sixth District in thanking Anthony W. Padula for his dedicated service to the United States of America.

ESSAY IN HONOR OF VETERANS  
DAY BY ANASTASIA TSAKONAS

**HON. JOSEPH CROWLEY**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, November 13, 2017*

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to include in the RECORD the words of my young constituent, Anastasia Tsakonas.

Her thanks and words of praise for our brave men and women in service ring loud and true.

Veterans Day is courage, sacrifice, and patriotism all rolled up into the uniform that an individual wore when they decided to protect this wonderful country.

Veterans Day is our reminder that we need to honor and celebrate all the men and women who have served or are currently serving in our military. Veterans are volunteers who offer their lives to protect and die for this country. It takes a lot of courage and strength to enter the military and purposely leave behind everything you love. Many Veterans leave behind their homes, families, and careers knowing that it will be a long time before they see them again. Unfortunately, with this type of sacrifice, many Veterans also know that they may never return to see any of them again.

Through a Veteran's selfless sacrifice, we as citizens receive freedom, a freedom that many people in this world would like to have but are not allowed. This freedom lets us enjoy peace, prosperity, the right of speech and religion, the right to education and most important—opportunity; all values and beliefs that this country was originally founded and built on and which continue to exist to this day because of our Veterans.

Let us take time to reflect on these men and women who receive nothing in return for protecting our country and be grateful to them that we still have our values and beliefs intact. President Coolidge said: "The nation which forgets its defenders will itself be forgotten."

Thank you Veterans, without you, I could not be me!

VETERAN URGENT ACCESS TO  
MENTAL HEALTHCARE ACT

SPEECH OF

**HON. HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, JR.**

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, November 7, 2017*

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 918, the Veteran Ur-

gent Access to Mental Healthcare Act. H.R. 918 directs the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide mental health care services to former members of the Armed Forces.

Mental health services would be administered to veterans immediately after their discharge, release, or deployment, and would continue as long as necessary. These services would be excluded from those who received a dishonorable or bad conduct discharge from the Armed Services. H.R. 918 would also permit the VA to provide mental health services at a non-VA facility if necessary, eliminating the barrier to treatment for so many rural veterans who are geographically isolated from VA facilities.

It is imperative that the VA helps the men and women who served our country when they return home. Not all injuries received by our veterans are visible but that does not mean they do not exist. Many veterans return home with mental health conditions and we need to accommodate them so they can get the treatment they need. This is why I support this legislation and encourage my colleagues to do so as well.

RESOLVING THE POLITICAL CRI-  
SIS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUB-  
LIC OF THE CONGO

**HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH**

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, November 13, 2017*

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, last week I held a hearing on the political crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The DRC was supposed to conduct elections one year ago this month in order to achieve the required transition of political power by December 19. However, after years of stalling on making preparations for elections, the Government of the DRC failed to hold elections last year and relied on a constitutional provision that President Joseph Kabila could not step down until an election was held to select a replacement.

This interpretation is in apparent contradiction to other constitutional provisions requiring elections to be held on time and limiting Kabila to two terms. The election commission has just announced that elections cannot be held until sometime in late 2018, with an inauguration in early 2019. The prolonging of the Kabila regime has ratcheted up tensions in the country.

Polling has indicated that a majority of Congolese want the Kabila government to end and be replaced by a transitional government until a new one can be elected.

Enduring conflict hotspots in eastern DRC have seen recent flare-ups, while new hotspots have emerged in previously relatively stable areas, such as the central Kasai region and southeastern Tanganyika province. The conflicts in Kasai and Tanganyika alone have caused the displacement of nearly 2 million people since mid-2016, giving DRC one of the highest rates of human displacement in the world. Political unrest in urban centers, a string of large prison breaks, and violent attacks in Kinshasa by members of a religious sect that has declared itself in opposition to Kabila have further contributed to worsening insecurity.

The conflict in Kasai, which reportedly was first sparked in 2016 by the murder of a traditional leader by state security forces, has become a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, featuring severe atrocities and the widespread recruitment and abuse of children. Meanwhile, the ongoing conflict in eastern DRC at one time saw violent activity by two dozen militia groups and an out-of-control national army, resulting in the systematic rape of about 50 women and girls each hour.

The hearing intended to look at possible solutions to a political stalemate that could very well lead to further violence and upheaval in a large African country bordering on nine neighbors. It followed a successful resolution on DRC that I introduced and was passed by the House last year and new legislation that Ranking Member BASS and I are introducing soon.

We understand that there are no easy solutions to the current crisis in DRC. A negotiated transition likely could be achieved if President Kabila were convinced that neither he nor his family would be prosecuted for human rights violations or corruption. However, that would reward them for abusing their citizens and plundering the country's resources, and that is even if members of his government were not covered.

A palace coup might take place to oust Kabila. That is not unknown in the DRC. Kabila's father, Laurent Kabila, was assassinated in office in 2001. Mobutu Sese Seko, who the elder Kabila had overthrown, had himself overthrown an elected government in 1965. He was chased from power and fled into exile in 1997. However, a coup would not support international efforts to instill democratic practices in the DRC and could lead to protracted in-fighting and national chaos.

The status quo, as detailed earlier, is already leading to growing violence and will not lead to a peaceful solution the longer a transition is delayed. In fact, it is more likely violence could escalate and spill over into neighboring countries as did conflict in 1996 through 97 and 1998 through 2003.

Over the past year, we have heard many promises by the Government of the DRC about when elections would be held. There have been several dates given for when voter registration would be completed during this past year. The current government timetable calls for voter registration to extend to a point at which elections couldn't be held in the DRC until late 2018 with an inauguration early in 2019. That would mean that Joseph Kabila would have had an extra half-term in office, when the constitution precluded him from going past December 2016.

Consequently, we heard last week from the State Department on our government's diplomatic efforts to resolve the transition stalemate and the U.S. Agency for International Development on our government's programs on the ground to promote democracy and free and fair elections.

Our second panel last week consisted of scholars and activists who gave us their informed suggestions on how we can break this political stalemate and prevent more bloodshed in the DRC.

Again, no solution will be easy or without cost, but non-action would have an even higher cost in human lives. That we must not tolerate.